



Lake Michigan Fact Sheet

SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL AREAS AROUND LAKE MICHIGAN

Lake Michigan has unique conditions that support a wealth of ecological diversity, including many plant and animal species and natural features found nowhere else in the world. Lake Michigan basin's sand dunes, coastal marshes, tallgrass prairies, savannas, forests, and fens all provide essential habitats for this diversity of life.

These native ecosystems are also precious resources for humans. In the Lake Michigan basin, fish, wild rice, blueberries, and cranberries are important foods for local consumption and export. Timber resources are at the base of a productive paper industry. Open space and beautiful scenery are appealing to residents and visitors. Easy transportation of goods and an abundant fresh water supply attracts industries. Over 10 million people live and work in an area also inhabited by rare species. Maintaining and improving the ecological integrity of the Lake Michigan ecosystem is vital. Our future depends on it.

From upland to coastal communities, the Lake Michigan basin has many significant environmental areas. While it is impossible to describe all of them, here is a brief portrait of a small selection of the basin's significant environmental areas:

Chiwaukee Prairie - Illinois Dunes

Crossing the Illinois-Wisconsin border, this system is located on a beach dune and swale complex along a 11.5-mile stretch of Lake Michigan. It contains precious expanses of ecologically fragile dunes, laden with wondrous flora and fauna unique to shorelines. Chiwaukee Prairie is an exceedingly rich complex of prairies, and is considered the most diverse Wet Prairie remaining in the Midwest. Coastal birds, such as ducks, geese, gulls, and shorebirds are plentiful. The marshes are home to the green heron, great blue heron, and American bittern.

Wolf River - Menominee Forest

The Wolf River is one of Wisconsin's most intact examples of a high-quality, undisturbed, cold stream. As such, it provides habitat for fish, mussels, and dragonflies. The Menominee Forest, located within the Menominee Reservation, is one of the largest unfragmented blocks of forest with old-growth characteristics in Wisconsin. This sustainably managed hardwood/conifer forest, containing hemlock and beech, maintains a great variety of plant and animal life.

Southern Lake Michigan

Extending from the south side of Chicago, Illinois to Michigan City, Indiana, the southern shore of Lake Michigan hosts an incredible number of significant ecosystems, some of very high quality. The Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore ranks third of all U.S. National Parks in plant diversity, even though its acreage is less than 3 percent of the top two parks (Grand Canyon and Great Smoky Mountains). The wetlands around Lake Calumet provide roosting and nesting areas for many regionally rare birds, such as black-crowned night herons, and serve as an important stopover point for migratory birds.

Michigan Islands

Michigan Islands are a collection of 11 variously sized islands located in northern Lake Michigan. The isolation of the islands provides secluded habitat for shoreline species sensitive to disturbances, like nesting sites for imperiled and rare birds, such as the endangered piping plover. Sand beaches, dunes, interdunal wetlands, and wooded beach ridges feature rare plant species such as the threatened pitcher's thistle and dwarf lake iris.

Southwestern Michigan

Comprising rolling hills and flat lakeplains of fertile soils, southwestern Michigan supports several important ecosystems. Unique habitats in this region support two endangered butterflies: the Mitchell's satyr and the Karner blue. The Allegan State Game Area Marshes are recognized as among the most diverse and least disturbed remaining examples of an inland coastal plain marsh community. Consisting of two excellent marsh complexes, the areas provide refuges for important wetland species. Blue Lakes, located in a sandy glacial outwash plain, embody high-quality examples of imperiled and significant oak barrens, and coastal plain marsh, dry sand prairie, and wet meadow communities.